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# THE CATHOLIC LAYMAN.

Ἡμεῖς τοὺς Θεοῦ ἀνὰ ἡμῶν, ἀγὺρ ῥιθόειαν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ τοῦ ναὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ.

LUKE II. 14.

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## CONTENTS.

	PAGE
What is a Bigot ?	25
The Fair of Loughmanagh	26
Rosa Madia	27
The Power of the Keys	27
Pious Frauds—The Louvain Testament	28
The Talk of the Road—No. X.	29
Latria, Hyperdulia, Dulia	30
Why do the Roman Catholic Priesthood evade Discussion ?	31
The Touchstone (continued)	31
CORRESPONDENCE—	
On the Baptism of Bells, by a Looker-on	32
On Image Worship and Miracles, by Mr. Collette	32
On Divorce and Marriage, by Mr. E. Power	33
On the Disputed Sacraments	34
On the Rock of the Church	34
Are the Missionaries doing anything in India ?	34
Farming Operations for March	35

## WHAT IS A BIGOT?

THOSE of our readers who take much interest in the great religious controversy which is now carried on in almost every part of Ireland, cannot fail to have noticed in how many cases hard words and hard names are made to take the place of fair and candid arguments. It is unfortunate for the cause of truth that controversy in general, and especially religious controversy, should have such a tendency to excite men's passions and to kindle the flames of angry prejudices in their minds. It is not our present business to inquire into the causes which produce this melancholy result; we merely advert to the fact as one which is not peculiar to our own age or country, but which has existed from the very earliest times. The apostles themselves experienced its ill effects, when their adversaries taunted them as persons "who had turned the world upside down" (Acts xvii. 6); and the orator Tertullus, when accusing St. Paul before the Roman governor, in a grave public trial, could find no more gentle or courteous terms by which to describe him, than that "he was a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition throughout all the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes."—Acts xxiv. 5. If the first teachers of the Gospel experienced such contumelious treatment, we need not marvel if those who in our own day attempt to stir up men's minds on the subject of religion meet with the like fate.

Among the harsh terms which are used in the present day, in religious controversy, there is scarcely any epithet which men are more ready to cast against their adversaries than that of *bigotry*. Nothing is more common than to hear it said—"Oh, such a man is an obstinate, narrow-minded bigot; no person of sense will mind what he says." It often happens that neither the individual who makes the charge nor they who hear it have any clear notion of the real meaning of the word. It is sufficient that both parties are aware that bigotry is a term of reproach, which is all the more effective for being ambiguous, inasmuch as each person can attach to it whatever unfavourable idea he pleases; and thus hostile prejudices are often excited, without any real or substantial grounds.

It may be useful, therefore, both for those who may be tempted to apply this term of reproach to their opponents, and for those who occasionally hear it used against themselves, to consider what is really meant by the term, and to what class of persons it may justly be applied. We do not wish to engage our readers in any antiquarian discussion as to the first origin of the term.\* We are content to take its meaning as we find

it laid down by Dr. Johnson, who is the highest authority in this matter. He defines bigotry to be "prejudice; unreasonable warmth in favour of party opinions;" and a bigoted man, according to the same author, is one who is "blindly prepossessed in favour of something; irrationally zealous." Bigotry, it is evident from this, is not warmth and zeal in anything; or rather zeal, and warmth, and prepossession are not bigotry; but *unreasonable* warmth, *blind* prepossession, *irrational* zeal, are bigotry; and those only are bigots to whose conduct such epithets can justly be ascribed.

As far as we ourselves are concerned, we shall not seek to disavow either warmth, or zeal, or prepossession. We confess that our minds were long prepossessed in favour of certain important truths before we entered upon the discussions which we have laid before our readers in the pages of this journal. We were prepossessed by a conviction that the Word of God is true; and that any creed or system of opinions which is not in accordance with this Word, and, much more, any system which is *contrary* to it, is fraught with very great danger to the souls of those who embrace it. This, however, is not bigotry, because it is not *blind* prepossession. The Bible proves itself to be the Word of God, and there can be nothing more reasonable than to believe that whatsoever is not in accordance with that Word cannot have come from God, for He cannot contradict himself. Neither are we anxious to acquit ourselves of the charge of zeal; for we have learned from St. Paul "to be zealous for that which is good in a good thing always."—Galat. iv. 18. We are zealous that our fellow-countrymen should be set free from the bondage of error and prejudice, and be brought to the knowledge of the truth; but such zeal is not bigotry, inasmuch as it is not irrational. We must further plead guilty to the charge of occasional warmth; but this is not bigotry, unless it be excessive and unreasonable. It would ill become us to say that we are entirely free from prejudice; but we think it would be unfair to bring such a charge against us, unless it can be shown that we have advanced some opinion for which we cannot give a satisfactory reason. As for party opinions, if the phrase is meant for principles founded on the Word of God, we do not disavow being prepossessed in favour of them. In matters of religion, there are, properly speaking, only two parties in the world; and we hope we shall always be found ready to advocate the opinions, or rather the principles, of that party which is on the side of real Christianity; but this is not bigotry, unless it be done with *unreasonable* warmth and unfair appeals to party prejudices.

Having thus endeavoured to defend ourselves, perhaps needlessly, from the charge of bigotry, it now remains for us to point out the class of persons to whom this term may justly and fairly be applied. That man, then, is a bigot, whose persuasion of the truth of his religion is founded upon prejudice, not upon evidence; who is blindly prepossessed in favour of it, and irrationally zealous in its support and propagation. That man is a bigot, who, without reasoning or inquiry, believes all that his Church teaches, and holds it undoubted that whatever is not taught by his Church must be heresy. Such conduct would be reasonable if it were the result of inquiry and rational conviction; but the man who is prepared to believe anything and everything that he is taught by his religious instructors would be a Mohammedan in Turkey, or a Buddhist in Hindostan, upon exactly the same grounds that he is a Roman Catholic in Italy or Ireland.

We are convinced that the cause of truth will always stand the test of fair and candid inquiry, and that blind prepossessions and prejudices, such as we have described, are no part of true religion. We are far from asserting that such prejudices are to be found only on one side. We believe that there are bigoted Protestants as well as bigoted Roman Catholics. We know that on both sides are to be found men of narrow minds and prejudiced understandings—hasty in forming an unfavourable opinion of their opponents, and prone to condemn without inquiry. We, for our part, are resolved, to the best of our ability, not to imitate such conduct. One of our chief motives in originating this journal was, because we believed that free discussion

must lead to more enlarged and liberal views, and would tend to dispel many of the false notions which each party is so ready to take up respecting those of the opposite side. We are deeply persuaded that all Christians, whatever may be the Church to which they belong, ought to bear in mind and to act upon the solemn injunction of the Apostle Peter, "to be ready always to satisfy every one that asketh them a reason of the hope which is in them"—1 Pet. iii. 15. In order that a man may be able to give a reason to others, however, it is evident that his own mind must be first enlightened as to the grounds of his religious belief. He ought to avail himself of every opportunity of becoming acquainted with the arguments in support of the doctrines which he professes to hold; and, on the other hand, he ought to be slow to condemn those who differ from him, unless he is first satisfied of the unsoundness of their views. And if, upon examination and careful inquiry, he becomes persuaded that others entertain erroneous opinions, it is his duty, not to censure them uncharitably, or to join in any acts of persecution against them, but rather to win them over by fair argument and kindly persuasion. The man who thus acts, whatever be his creed, will be sure to gain the respect and esteem even of his opponents: but the narrow-minded partisan, whose judgment is warped by prejudice, and who is opposed to full and free discussion, who forms his own opinions blindly, and condemns others without inquiry, is a bigot, and a foe to the cause of truth.

It may at first sight appear a very strange phenomenon, that many persons who exhibit great credulity themselves, and who take up their religious belief, as it were, upon trust, are sometimes very angry when other persons venture to adopt opinions different from theirs. It seems a curious anomaly, that a man who has bestowed little or no industry upon the business of seeking truth for himself, should suddenly become indignant when he sees his neighbour anxiously inquiring where that precious treasure may be found; and that he should be too often ready either to persecute him for so doing, or else to ascribe his conduct to base and interested motives. Such occurrences are, unfortunately, but too common in our own country; and we believe that, in many cases, the real motive of such conduct is this. A man whose religious belief is founded on rational inquiry, who has himself examined the reasons for his faith, and perceived them to be solid and well-grounded, can afford to stand alone. Not so, however, the individual whose creed is based on prejudice and blind credulity. His mind having no solid foundation on which to repose itself, and being devoid of a rational conviction of the truth of his creed, he naturally looks out for a numerous companionship in the faith which he professes. His belief, and the comfort of his belief, mount with the tens, and hundreds, and thousands, that are seen to be travelling along the same road with himself; and thus it naturally comes to pass, that as his faith depends upon the faith of others, his doubts, too, are in their power. If his friends or neighbours waver in their religious belief, or if they change it altogether, a rude shock is given to his own inward peace of mind. It is not so much that his convictions are assailed, and his pride and self-love irritated by their opposition, but it is because something is withdrawn from the internal warmth and comfort of his soul, so that he can no longer feel as tranquil as before. He is unwilling, perhaps, to acknowledge, even to his own mind, that his neighbour's change of opinion has robbed him of any part of his own assurance of the truth of his creed; but yet, nevertheless, his feelings are the same as if he had been despoiled of that precious possession; and these feelings prompt him to resent the injury, and to visit it upon the unoffending cause.

Credulity, therefore, and bigotry go hand in hand; and when they are combined, as in the case we have just described, they too often break out into bitter persecution and open violence. The true, and, indeed, almost the only remedy for such evils, is to be found in an enlarged spirit of fair and dispassionate inquiry, which, in proportion as it enlightens the mind of him who seeks for the truth, will, at the same time, teach him forbearance and moderation towards others. The doubts and difficulties of the young student in geometry cause no

\* It may amuse some of our readers to be told that the name *bigot* is a very ancient one, and that the person who gave occasion for its use is said to have been Rollo, the first Duke of Normandy. (*Vide Stephan. Paschasium. Disquisit. Francic.*, lib. 8., c. 2; et *Chronic. Historie Franc. de Rollone, primo Normannorum ducis*).—"Hic non est dignatus pedem Caroli oculari, nisi ad os suum levaret. Cumque sui Comes illum admovent, ut pedem Regis in acceptione tanti muneris (Neustrie provincie) oscularetur, lingua Anglica respondit, Ne se bigot, quod interpretatur, Ne per Deum. Rex vero et sui illum deridentes et sermonem ejus corrupte referentes, illum vocaverunt Bigoth unde Normanni adhuc Bigothi vocantur."

uncertainty in the mind of the profound mathematician. His convictions are too deep and solid to be so disturbed: but yet he can sympathize with those who feel such doubts, because they remind him of his own past experience. On the other hand, the man who is blindly credulous, and who believes or disbelieves without inquiry, knows nothing of scruples or difficulties, and has no fellow feeling for others who may be searching for truth. He cannot understand why every one does not exactly coincide in opinion with himself; and the first show of opposition to his views only makes him obstinate and angry. When two narrow-minded disputants of this latter kind come together, instead of discussing their differences in a calm and Christian spirit, they would be ready, perhaps, like the two bishops at the Council of Trent, to pull one another's beards, were it not that, unfortunately, the daily use of razors now leaves men no beards to pull.

We have seen that bigotry has been described as "a blind prepossession" in favour of some peculiar opinions. One of the most common ways in which it exhibits itself is, when a man is induced, from some cause or other, to attach himself to some one individual, and to adopt all his views without inquiry. It is thus that party leaders acquire an ascendancy over their followers, which enables them to twist and turn them so as to advance their own interests, utterly regardless of the welfare of their misguided adherents. It is, doubtless, a far easier plan to adopt blindly the opinions of others than to be at the trouble of forming them for ourselves; but we need scarcely remark, that it is sometimes a very dangerous plan, especially when we fall into the hands of those who have any pecuniary or other interest in misleading us. Religion is a subject of such deep and momentous importance, that, if we value it aright, we ought to study it for ourselves, and not allow our creed to depend upon the word of any man, or any set of men.

We cannot, even if we would, divest ourselves of the duty of inquiry where religious truth is concerned; and if we really wish to be set free from the bondage of bigotry and prejudice, if we seek to arrive at truth, and to attain some solid resting-place, on which we can safely take our stand, for time and eternity, there is no better or surer path for us to follow than that marked out for us by the Apostle Paul (1 Thess. v. 21)—*"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."*

### THE FAIR OF LOUGHMANAGH.

I suppose that everybody knows that the great fair of Loughmanagh, in the county of Westmeath, is held every Valentine's day. There was a capital fair last month; I don't know when there was a better show of beasts, and very good prices they fetched. Pat Murray, that some of you may have heard of, was there selling cattle for his master; and a very good job he made of it, and he had a good bundle of bank notes in his pocket with him when he was going home in the evening. Mike Dolan walked home with him, for he had been at the fair, too, where he had laid out his money on a little slip of a pig that he was driving home before him. The two men were very good friends, and they had a pleasant walk together (Pat in great spirits at the bargain he had made) until they got about half way home, when, just after you cross the bridge, and a little before you come to Cassidy's public-house, who should they meet but Brian Shaughnessy, the big beggarman. I don't think either of them were glad to meet him, for there was never a more lazy, good-for-nothing scoundrel than that same Shaughnessy: every penny he could get went for whisky, and it was not his own money that paid for it either, but he had such a tongue that there was not one that liked to provoke him or that would not rather any day give him a trifle than stand the abuse he would give if they refused him. So when he and the boys had saluted each other,

"I'll walk back with you," says he, "to Cassidy's and you'll treat me, and give me some money to take with me, for you must have plenty of it after the fair."

"Indeed, then," says Pat Murray, "I'll not stop at Cassidy's or any where else, for its growing dark, and I don't want to be out late these winter evenings with money in my pocket."

Mike Dolan made some excuse, too, for not stopping; but Shaughnessy was not to be put off, and says he, "I don't mind if you can't stop; but at any rate you'll just give me half-a-crown between you, for it's well you can afford it, and I'll leave you my blessing."

\* Let our readers should suppose that this is a calumny of some bigoted Protestant historian, we here present them with the words of the orthodox Cardinal Pallavicini, who certainly would not needlessly say anything to the discredit of the venerable men who composed the Council—"Tum vero Causis, ut mos est iracundia percussis, exarsit in nitorem longe perniciosisse utroque ipsa injuria quam utrumque. Nam in Chronensis barbam injecta manu, malis ex eo pilos avulsit, et confestim abesset."—*Vide Pallav. Hist. Conc. Trient. Tom. i. p. 377, Aug. Vin. 1775.* We pity the poor bishop who thus lost a handful of hairs out of his beard; and we could almost fancy that, when Dr. Johnson defined bigotry to mean "unreasonable warmth in favour of party opinions," he had these venerable combatants in his eye. It may be deemed, perhaps, some excuse for their quarrel, that the point in dispute related to the ab-truse doctrine of original sin! Notwithstanding these bitter internal discussions, however, the Council of Trent, claiming to act under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, boldly pronounced their usual anathema upon all who presumed to differ from the decree at which they finally arrived!

"Why, then, Brian," says Mike Dolan, "I am very sorry, and I'd give it to you with all my heart if I had it, but I laid out the last penny I had with me on this little pig here, and I have not got a cross now to bless myself with."

"Well," says Brian, "Pat, you can't put me off that way, for I heard from all the neighbours I met how well you did at the fair; and I know you have your pocket full of money, if you have the heart to give a poor man some."

"Sure, then," says Pat, "you must know very well that what I sold the beasts for is not my money, but my master's. I have not got any money of my own with me, and you would not have me take the master's money and give it to you."

"Troth, then, would I," said Brian, "he is rich enough not to miss it; and how does he know what you sold the beasts for? and it's little sin to take it from the likes of him, and give it to a poor man like me."

So says Pat Murray, "You may say what you like, but you will not make it out to be anything but robbery, if I was to take the master's money and make a present of it to you. I may be as charitable as I like with my own money, but I have no right to be charitable with other people's. But I'll tell you what's more, Brian Shaughnessy," says he, "if the money was my own I would not give you one penny of it. I am a struggling man, with a wife and five small children to support, and I don't think it would be any charity to take the bread out of their mouths and give it to you, that's as well able to work as I am, but that never does a hand's turn, and would spend anything I gave you drinking at Cassidy's."

With that Brian was very angry, as you may suppose, and very bad words he gave. Mike Dolan became terribly frightened—

"For the love of heaven, Pat," whispered he, "give him what he asks, and don't bring his curse on you and the children." But Pat only answered stouter and stouter; and the end of it was, that Brian Shaughnessy went down on his knees in the middle of the road, and put such fearful curses on Pat Murray and all his seed and generation, that it would make your hair stand on end to listen to him.

"O Pat Murray, Pat Murray," said Mike Dolan when they walked on; "the saints between us and harm; but why would not ye take my advice and give him what he asked? I would not for a thousand pound be in your skin this blessed night, after the curses he put on you. It would be better for you to run after him now and make it up with him, and get him to take them off."

"I'll do no such thing, then," said Pat; "what should I be afraid of him for? Is it because I would not rob the master's money, and give it to a good-for-nothing scoundrel like him? Do you think his prayers have such influence with the Almighty, that the Lord would punish me for not breaking one of his own commands because he bids me? If his prayers have so much effect as all that comes to, why does not he pray himself a good coat on his back and plenty of money in his pockets, and then he would have no need to tempt an honest man to do a wrong thing for his benefit?"

"Ah, then, Pat," said Mike Dolan, "that's no way for you to talk. You ought to know as well as I do, that many a one has suffered from the curse of people that were never able to pray much good for themselves or anybody else."

"Why, then," says Pat, "you'll never persuade me to that—you'll never make me believe that the Lord is more willing to do harm than to do good; or that if a man can't pray himself out of poverty, he can pray other people into it."

"Well, then," said Mike, "what do you say to poor Norah Callaghan, that this same Brian Shaughnessy cursed? I know that she was recovering from her confinement when he begged at her house, and I don't know what made her refuse him; but refuse him she did, and give him cross words besides; and he gave her such a curse that she went back to her bed, and never rose up from it again alive."

"Why, I say," says Pat, "that it's no wonder. She is not the first person a fright has killed. I could tell you stranger stories than that, that I heard from Thady Byrne, the pensioner, of things he saw when he was in the West Indies. He told me that the blacks there have got what they call Obeah men; and when one of these puts his curse upon one of them, the poor fellow sickens and pines, and he never will tell who has cursed him; and if nothing is done at last he dies; and sometimes whole scores of them die this way by one of these Obeah men; but if the master can find the fellow out, and give him a sound flogging, all the sick fellows recover at once."

"The Lord only knows," says Mike, "what power wicked spirits have; and I don't doubt but, as you say, God can't be more ready to hear prayers for evil than for good; but maybe the devil hears the curse and brings it to pass."

"So, then," says Pat, "you want me to be afraid lest the devil should bring Brian Shaughnessy's curses on me. Now, I tell you that I don't doubt that the devil would be well pleased enough if Brian Shaughnessy could tempt me to wrong my master; and I don't doubt, too, but that the devil would be willing enough to hurt me, whether Brian Shaughnessy tells him or no; but while I try

to obey God, I am not afraid of man or devil hurting me beyond what he permits them. And I think I might as well say my prayers to the devil at once as let Brian Shaughnessy make interest for me with him not to hurt me; or as well as do a wrong thing, lest he should persuade him to do me a mischief. Believe my words, Mike Dolan, Brian Shaughnessy can't put any one in the devil's power but himself; his wicked words can't harm those that are in God Almighty's keeping; and if a curse puts any one in the devil's power, it is those who speak it. I'll show you," says he, "out of the Psalms who it is that cursing harms;" and he pulls a book out of his pocket, and he reads this verse which describes the punishment of him that took pleasure in cursing his neighbour—"As he loved cursing so let it come to him: as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him. As he clothed himself with cursing like as with his garment, so let it come into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones."—Psalm cviii. 18.

So when he had read these words, Mike Dolan stopped short, and "Pat," said he, "what book is that you are reading these words out of?"

"What book should it be," said Pat, "but God's own book? sure it's the Bible."

"The Bible!" says Mike, lifting up his hands; "O Pat, Pat, sure it's not Bible reader you are turned. Did not you hear what Father Sheehy threatened from the altar against all those that would read that book? It's well known it makes all those heretics that read it; and, then, Father Sheehy will curse you from the altar with bell, book, and candle, and what will become of you then, here and hereafter?"

"Why," says Pat, "I hope, with God's blessing, I may survive Father Sheehy's curse as well as Brian Shaughnessy's."

"What!" says Mike, "are you going to even the curse of a fellow like Brian Shaughnessy with the curse of a priest of the Church? Though I don't read the Bible, I've heard how the prophets of old could call down fire from heaven on those that would not obey them, and how the apostles, too, could punish those that despised them, and I know God is with his Church still, and that a priest's curse is sure to be heard."

"Well," says Pat, "I do read the Bible, and I can tell you that you are very much mistaken if you think that either prophets or apostles cursed out of their own heads; they could do no more than foretell the good or the evil which God was about to bring on those who loved him, or on those who despised him; but they could not make any harm happen to any one against God's will. And if you'll attend to me, I'll read for you the story of the Prophet Balaam, which is told in the 22nd of Numbers. You must know that there was one Balak, King of Moab, who was an enemy of the Jews in those days, and he had often heard of the Prophet Balaam, and he knew that good or evil had often followed according as he had blessed or cursed. 'I know,' said he to Balaam, 'that he whom thou blessed is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed.' So you must know, Mike, that Balak thought the prophet put on his curses all out of his own head, and that he could curse any one he liked, and that, if he could get him to curse his enemies, the Jews, it would be all over with them; and he offered to pay Balaam well for doing the job. Balaam, though he was a prophet, was not a good man, and well pleased enough he would be to earn the king's money; but he knew better than to think that he could curse any one if God did not bid him; and he knew very well, too, that if he did curse, it was himself and not the Jews that would suffer by it. So, though he was longing for the money, he did not dare to give the curse. 'How shall I curse,' said he, 'those whom God has not cursed?' and at last, says he—'If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more.' That's the story, Mike, of the way the prophets had the power of cursing; and as for the apostles, I know that St. Peter was able to strike Ananias and Sapphira dead when they lied unto the Holy Ghost; but I know, too, that the apostles never thought they might curse any one they liked out of their own heads. Many a beating St. Peter and St. Paul got, and many a time they were shut up in prison, and they never once ventured to put their curse on those that ill-used them. But," says Pat, "I'll believe that Father Sheehy has the power of cursing, like the apostles, when I see him work miracles as they did. Let him cure the lame, and make the blind see, and raise the dead, and then, if we see that God hears his prayers for good, we will have cause to be frightened when he prays us harm."

"O Pat, Pat," said Mike, "I am afeard you are in a bad way, hardening yourself that way; there is no knowing what the priest might do to you."

"Well," says Pat, "I often heard say that he could turn a boy into a hare, but I tell you now, and I'd say it to Father Sheehy himself, this minute, here I am now, and you may turn me into a hare, or a rabbit, or a cow, or any other beast you like, if you can. Somehow or other, Mike, I don't think he'd do it when it came to that; and if the priest can make cows as easy as all that, suppose, instead of turning good Christians into cows, he was to turn the rats and mice into them, he might stock his farms then without going to the fair of Loughmanagh, or without troubling us much about dues either."